COUNCIL OF CALIFORNIA GROWERS
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WELFARE, POLITICS, LABOR AND WELFARE...THE WHEEL COMES FULL CIRCLE AND THE CRISIS GROWS

With so much attention...political and otherwise...being focused on the unemployed...on the nation's "pockets of poverty"...and on the need to "match men with jobs"...an incident that took place in Alameda County last week seemed a bit paradoxical.

It even bordered on the ironic. Particularly when it occurred at almost the same time that Governor Brown, citing the great unemployment problem, quoting the "unified feelings of organized labor", and the "position of the Mexican Government", stated that NO extension of the bracero program would pass Congress this year.

And what made the Alameda incident even more amazing was the fact that as it took place, California growers were being certified by the State and Federal Governments for the greatest number of temporary foreign workers...braceros...required so far this year. Not only as the big "stoop labor" peak in tomatoes approaches, but for work in peach harvesting in areas that haven't required braceros in years. For this year we had one of those "little unforseeable quirks" that make agriculture a bit different than other industries. This one involved weather. And rain. Weather which drove the domestics that historically pick peaches and other soft fruit elsewhere thus leaving tons of peaches on the trees... unharvested.

What happened in Alameda? Just a little ol sit-in...a common place incident these days, true. But this was a little different in that this particular group was protesting the * Alameda County Welfare Department's agricultural employment program for able bodied, "psychologically adjusted" welfare recipients.

Led by a group known as the WELFARE RIGHTS ORGANIZATION...and supported by CORE, the AD HOC COMMITTEE (of San Francisco Auto Row and Sheraton Palace sit-in fame) plus a group * called, YOUTHS FOR JOBS...the pickets, and later the sit-ins, complained that the Department's agricultural employment program was "DEGRADING".

* "FARM WORK IS BELOW OUR DIGNITY" protested the sit-ins. "WE'RE ENTITLED TO OUR WELFARE CHECKS AND NO ONE'S GOT THE RIGHT TO SAY THAT WE GOT TO TAKE FARM JOBS TO GET THOSE CHECKS".

In spite of Welfare Director Harold B. Kehoe's explanation of the original and basic reasons for the welfare program plus his repeated announcements that even unskilled peach * pickers were making an average of $2.00 per hour...the Welfare Rightsers were unmoved. So unmoved, in fact, that they staged an 84 hour "protest" sit-in.

Chanting, "We know our rights and we don't have to work to get them" interspersed with an * occasional, "Freedom Now"...the sit-ins sat...the public officials looked harassed and embarrassed...growers around the state continued their search for workers and...peaches fell to the ground.

Does this mean that the peach crop is lost? By no means. There will be plenty of peaches going through the canneries because...overall...the crop is being harvested. Oh sure, some growers will be hurt. Others...including the owners of the orchards that we toured personally, will lose their shirts this year. But even that isn't the point.

What IS the point? Well, really there are quite a few. One of which was rather succinctly analyzed by a newsman covering the Alameda sit-ins. A newsman, by the way, in good standing with his union and an old pro in covering the news beats of the Bay Area...and other metropolitan areas.

He put it this way...and we quote..."What a h--- of a situation THIS is. The growers are breaking their necks to get workers, the politicians are talking about putting America back to work and these people...the VERY people the government is saying NEED jobs, don't WANT jobs. And why? Because it's too easy to get something for nothing. Why get out in * the fields and sweat, stoop, squat or reach for d--- good money...if your're willing to * work...when you can sit back, do nothing, and get enough from uncle taxpayer to get along! Brother...now I've seen everything."

- over -

* These are the poor people you are so concerned about!!

WELFARE, POLITICS, LABOR AND WELFARE...(continued)

Well, as a matter of fact, he HASN'T seen everything. In fact he hasn't seen anything yet. Wait until next year when there are no braceros to fill in as a temporary, supplemental work force. Wait until the thousands of workers in the allied industries who rely on these bracero harvested crops for their jobs are laid off those jobs. Wait * until California's 12 BILLION DOLLAR PER YEAR AGRIBUSINESS INDUSTRY starts to fold in the middle. Then our newsman friend will have seen everything.

And if you think this is an exaggeration, then you haven't been too close to the growing amount of correspondence between top officials in such closely allied industries as ice and refrigeration, banking, trucking, railroading, air and water transportation, canning, * paper and carton manufacturing, printing and lithography...and more. Correspondence that indicates a growing concern over the farm labor situation. Correspondence that asks "after the braceros what?" Correspondence that indicates an increasing uneasiness over the pat answers from the Governor to the effect that "California growers will have adequate labor to harvest next years crops". And...it would seem, there is reason for this uneasiness. Particularly since the ball has been thrown to labor...and they haven't provided the answer. And to the Governor...who, upon further questioning such as took place at his last news conference, admits that he doesn't know where the labor will come from!

Oh...to clarify the record. Organized labor is NOT "unified" in its opposition to some type of temporary, supplemental foreign labor. While top AFL-CIO officials PUBLICLY announce their opposition, others closer to reality and their own people who work in the allied industries share the same concern...privately...as do the management people of * these industries. And of course, the TEAMSTERS...very close to the problem and, it would seem, very realistic in their appraisal of the situation and the jobs of their members... have stated for months that they feel some kind of supplemental foreign labor will be required for at least five years!

Also...for the record...while the Governor said that "Mexico itself doesn't want an extension" and "probably wouldn't sign a new treaty", there's more to that story too. The Mexican Counsul General in San Francisco, Senor Adolfo G. Dominquez, told newsmen questioning him on this matter that it was his understanding that his government felt that the bracero program was a mutually beneficial program for the two countries and that as long as the United States felt this way, then he was certain that his government would agree to continue the program. Dominguez concluded the interview with a statement to the effect that his country would certainly not initiate the termination of any such mutually beneficial program! * This belies your friend H. Anderson's reasoning, which

However, there IS one OTHER factor that comes into play. And...as one observer put it, maybe this is what the Governor was thinking about when he made his statement about the Mexican Government's alleged, or at least "reported", feelings on the matter. That thought is simply this:

While both countries benefit a good deal under a bracero type program, Mexico would certainly benefit a great deal more if there were no supplemental labor for California farms. WHY? Because then Mexico would REALLY be the producer, processor and supplier for the nation's table foods. California surely wouldn't be. And the Eastern States can't possibly produce the volume of quality farm products we produce here. So it would HAVE to go to Mexico. As indeed a great deal of our fruit and vegetable production AND processing already has.

And what a kick in the teeth THAT would be to the economy of California...to the allied industries involved...to the investors in those industries and...to their labor force. Then we WOULD have an unemployment problem! But then there's always welfare.

* Labor Unions are finally realizing they might be killing the goose that laid the golden eggs.

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in many of his arguements is rather far-fetched. His tables of statistics are obviously hand picked. It would be very simple to obtain 429 or 125 or 380 sample reports which pointed up the exact opposite picture.

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